

INSPECTION REPORT

MULBERRY BUSH SCHOOL

Standlake

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123330

Headteacher: Andy Lole

Lead inspector: George Derby

Dates of inspection: 2 – 4 November 2004

Inspection number: 268601

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: Non-maintained special school
Age range of pupils: 5 - 12
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 35

School address: Abingdon Road
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Oxfordshire
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Telephone number: 01865 300202
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Appropriate authority: The trustees
Name of chair of trustees: Dr Gina Alexander

Date of previous inspection: April 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Mulberry Bush is a non-maintained special school for up to 36 pupils (boys and girls). Pupils attend on a residential basis seven days a week. The school supports staff and pupils through its therapeutic (psychodynamic) approach and supports parents through its family team. It is a highly popular school with parents and carers, local education authorities and social services departments and draws its pupils from the whole of the country. Pupils placed at the school are some of the most damaged and/or challenging children in the country and many have suffered physical and emotional abuse in their early childhood. They all have severe emotional and behavioural difficulties and most have been unable to be educated in local mainstream schools. Many have been permanently excluded from these schools or have had poor attendance. Just under a half of the pupils are in the care of their local authorities. The youngest pupils are currently in Year 2 and the oldest in Year 7. There are twice as many boys as girls, which is usual for this type of school. Pupils normally stay a maximum of three years before transferring to mainstream or special school. There are five classes. Two classes (known as the foundation classes) are made up of pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 who have had the least amount of time in the school and who are the most emotionally vulnerable. Three other classes contain pupils from Year 3 to Year 7.

About eighty per cent of the children are from white backgrounds and the remainder are from mixed black or Caribbean backgrounds. Many children are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. No pupils are learning English as an additional language. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average for their ages and some have additional learning difficulties.

The school has an informal relationship with the Tavistock Clinic in London. This has enabled the clinic to provide education for up to 15 day pupils who are registered as attending for education at Mulberry Bush. Trustees are currently establishing the exact nature of the school's management responsibilities in relation to this.

The school received the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the School Achievement Award in 2003.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
25349	George Derby	Lead inspector	Science Information and communication technology Music Residential provision
32677	Brian Horley	Lay inspector	
20444	David Hughes	Team inspector	Mathematics Art and design Design and technology Personal, social and health education /citizenship
10099	Sue Lewis	Team inspector	English Geography History Religious education Special educational needs

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	10
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	17
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	19
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 to 2	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	29

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school which has some excellent features. Pupils achieve very well overall, and exceptionally so in their personal development. The school's excellent ethos very successfully modifies pupils' attitudes to life and work and enables many to return to their local areas and mainstream schools. The quality of the teaching and learning are good. The interesting activities provided in lessons and the culture developed for learning through clubs and in residence, mean that pupils develop a real keenness to learn and willingness to participate. The school is very well led with a very clear sense of direction. As a result, there is very strong determination from all leaders and managers for the highest standards and there is excellent teamwork among the different departments. The costs to educate a pupil at Mulberry Bush are very high; nevertheless, because of what the school achieves for children, it gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- As a result of the high quality monitoring of pupils' academic and personal achievement, staff have an excellent knowledge of pupils' needs and this enables them to support all aspects of pupils' development flexibly and so meet their special educational needs exceptionally well.
- Excellent communication between senior staff from all the different support teams means that all work closely to achieve common goals.
- Relationships between staff and with pupils are excellent; the school is an extremely harmonious community.
- Induction procedures for new staff and new pupils are highly effective.
- The management of pupils' behaviour is exceptionally skilful; many pupils make very great strides; by Year 6 or 7 many are ready to move on, displaying few signs of the extremely disturbed behaviour they entered the school with.
- Occasionally, activities and lessons are not always organised in a way which is conducive to smooth transition and do not always support pupils' continued involvement.
- Although improving, and satisfactory overall, more attention needs to be given to how pupils can to reinforce their information and communication technology (ICT) skills by using these in other lessons and to how ICT can support their learning in subjects.

Improvement since the school was inspected in 1999 has been good overall. The school has thoroughly embraced the target setting process, both for the school as a whole and for individual pupils. Individual target setting is at the heart of the school's work and the pupil plan that is produced as a result of the regular multi-professional meetings is very good and serves as the focus for all the professionals' work. The pupils' targets are now very well tied into their Statements and Annual Reviews. Through the development of its special educational needs policy, and the training provided for staff, the school has a considerably better understanding of pupils' additional needs. Educational assessment has improved very well and is now very strong.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

All groups of pupils **achieve well**, despite the fact that many achieved relatively little before coming to Mulberry. This is because the school provides high quality advice, guidance and support for pupils and backs this up with good quality teaching. It is the combination of the pupils' excellent personal achievement, together with their good academic progress, which results in their very good achievement overall. Achievement in pupils' personal skills and development is excellent because of the very wide range of opportunities pupils have to learn, including those outside lesson time.

Pupils achieve very well in English, religious education and the taught programme for PSHE, and well in mathematics, science, art and design and design and technology. Achievement overall in ICT is good. Recent progress is very good in ICT because of the consistent and highly focused way it is now taught. However, more needs to be done to support the use of ICT in other subjects so that pupils' ICT skills are reinforced and their learning in other subjects is enhanced.

By the time they leave the school the pupils' personal qualities are excellent; although their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall, their self-knowledge is excellent. Pupils, despite their previous histories, have a keen interest in their lessons and the improvement in their behaviour is very good. They mostly behave very well in lessons, although some find the stress of maintaining their attention over long periods very difficult initially. Attendance is very good; punctuality is satisfactory.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. The quality of teaching and learning is good with very good features. Lessons are planned well with work matched very well to pupils' special educational needs. Teachers, assistants and behaviour support staff manage pupils exceptionally well, and give them high levels of encouragement and praise. Occasionally, teachers could find a wider range of ways to engage and involve pupils, including using ICT more. Staff expect a great deal from pupils and pupils do their best to live up to their expectations. Pupils work very hard and productively. Teaching assistants provide very good support and know the pupils very well. Other aspects, such as the very good curriculum with its very good opportunities to enrich pupils' learning, the excellent guidance and support for pupils, and the very good links with the community, very strongly contribute to the pupils' opportunities and achievement. The links with parents are very good. Health and safety are satisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are very good and the work of the trustees is also very good. Exceptional teamwork is at the heart of the school's success and leaders from the education team, family team, therapeutic support, residential care and directorate form a cohesive body which provides a clear steer for all the school's work. Communication in this highly complex organisation is excellent. Staff are very well trained, in line with the needs of the establishment. The trustees are very committed to high standards and to ensuring all pupils are as fully included in school and community life as possible. They are very supportive, monitor and challenge the work of the school very well but could be more directly involved in forward planning. They evaluate the school's performance as far as they can and are looking for more objective ways of doing this. The headteacher and director provide very strong leadership and, along with all staff teams and the trustees, have a very clear vision for the future of the school. The work of subject co-ordinators is good. Financial planning and management are very good. This is a school that reflects exceptionally well on what it does and how it can do things better.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents, carers and pupils have very positive views of the school. Parents very strongly praise the school's work. Many pupils hated school before being admitted to Mulberry Bush. Pupils like their lessons and activities very much, although a few identified other pupils' behaviour and bullying as an issue. Inspectors found relationships to be excellent, although incidents do occur from time to time because of pupils' special educational needs. Any actual bullying or harassment is dealt with very effectively by the school.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that when activities change during lessons or during transfers between school and residence, staff do all they can to ensure a smooth transition and that pupils remain as settled as possible.

- Ensure that pupils' ICT skills are developed through other subjects and that ICT is used more to support teaching and learning in all subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Pupils' academic achievements are good. Standards in all subjects are below what they should be for the pupils' ages, although for some individual pupils across the school these are nearer to those expected (and sometimes above) for the pupils' ages. However, given the considerable strides made in their personal development and the low starting points of many pupils, the standards pupils achieve overall are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school's climate for learning very strongly promotes achievement; staff value pupils' efforts considerably and this spurs them on to work very hard and to want to achieve highly.
- Pupils' achievements are high as a result of the very good attention to their personal learning needs and the high quality support they receive.
- All pupils achieve similarly; lower-attaining pupils and those with additional needs get considerable support, which aids their achievement.
- Achievement in English, religious education and in the taught programme of PSHE is very good; it is good in mathematics, science, ICT, art and design and design and technology.

Commentary

1. The school's climate for learning is excellent and fully supports pupils' personal and academic achievement. The way the wide range of staff work so closely together to assess, review and meet pupils' needs results in them gaining an excellent knowledge of the pupils' needs and especially of their personal, social and emotional needs. This means that pupils who previously were often antagonistic to learning, leave with attitudes and skills that form a real foundation for later achievement. The excellent teamwork results in pupil plans (the individual target setting records) which are highly specific and which optimise the efforts of the staff; these ensure that pupils make the best progress.
2. Good teaching that has very good features leads to strong and often very strong learning. The broad range of learning opportunities in lessons and the excellent 24 hour curriculum mean that pupils' achieve their very best. The average percentage of pupils returning to mainstream school and living at home is 33 per cent. This is a high percentage given the severity of pupils' needs. The remainder of pupils transfer to special schools or to other residential settings; they too have achieved very well in relation to their starting points and, although not attending mainstream school, have improved significantly in their ability to deal with life and work among others.
3. The very good programme for PSHE has a major influence on pupils' personal development, and together with the 24 hour curriculum, results in very high levels of personal achievement. All pupils enter the school with significantly low self-esteem and severe emotional and behavioural difficulties and have achieved little academically owing to the complexities of their behavioural difficulties. For many, their limited educational progress has exacerbated their emotional difficulties. In addition, many pupils have considerable gaps in their knowledge because of their absence from their previous schools. The celebration of the pupils' efforts, the way personal achievement is praised and rewarded and the very effective way pupils are taught to communicate and behave enable them to value their own efforts and achievements and those of others. This results in pupils trying hard with their work and leads to 'success breeding success'. The school is particularly successful in giving pupils confidence in

expressing themselves and in working together with others. Often standards are below those attained by most pupils of a similar age. In some subjects such as science however, a few pupils attain levels that are in line with or above national expectations and these are reflected in the individual attainments of those pupils who are entered for the national tests in Year 6.

4. The good academic curriculum together with the excellent 24 hour curriculum provides a very wide range of challenging, stimulating activities that are underpinned by a very good knowledge of the pupils' needs. A high level of awareness of the needs of pupils among staff, and the ways in which their engagement in activities can be encouraged, results in programmes that are very well tailored to their needs. The very strong partnership with the wide range of support staff, residential staff, therapy team, family and educational psychologist support pupils' achievements very well. The support for such pupils has improved well since the last inspection and provision overall has been strengthened.
5. Planning for pupils' many and varied needs is now at the forefront of members of staff's minds. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The close liaison between teachers and the additional special educational needs co-ordinator results in targets which are fully taken account of in lessons and known by pupils. Very good attention is given to pupils' literacy and numeracy needs. Teaching assistants are used very well in class and for support on an individual basis. They know the pupils' needs very well and carry forward strategies that they learned and developed in training to working with pupils in lessons.
6. Through the well planned use and appropriate adaptation of the National Strategies for literacy and numeracy pupils are taught reading, writing and mental and oral skills in a systematic way. The school is exceptionally good at turning around pupils' attitudes to literacy, often a major stumbling block in their previous schools. Pupils know that their teachers have high expectations of them, but rise to them because they know the teachers will support them to make progress. All children who are two years or more behind their chronological age in English and mathematics have specific literacy and numeracy targets that they are working towards and know well. They are very keen to improve their English skills because they know that this will help them in all other aspects of their work and life. Pupils make very good progress from their starting points in all aspects of English, and particularly so in reading. There is a significant transformation for many children, previously disenchanted with school work and their own capabilities. Similarly, the very good teaching in ICT helps pupils believe in themselves and this is a key factor in the recent very good progress they make. In religious education, their high level of achievement is because the staff's approach means that pupils' interest and attention is considerably engaged through stories and artefacts. Interesting and lively teaching, a carefully thought out programme and some good resources and artefacts all make a significant contribution.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is very good and punctuality is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes are good and their behaviour is very good. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The opportunities given to pupils to develop their self-knowledge and spiritual awareness are excellent.
- The school works very well with parents and carers to promote very good attendance.
- The school has very high expectations for pupils' behaviour and uses very good and effective methods which produce very good improvement in pupils' behaviour.

Commentary

7. The family team work closely with parents and carers to ensure that pupils attend at the start of term and after visits home. Extensive arrangements are made by the school to collect pupils from a variety of points as far away as Birmingham.
8. Pupils achieve excellently in their personal development and the school fulfils what it sets out to do in the considerably challenging aims set out in its mission statement. This has a significant impact of their willingness to learn and is one of the reasons why their academic achievement is good. The school works effectively to develop pupils' desire for success. It celebrates their achievements and, as a result, their attitudes to work and to school show consistent improvement. In class and around the school every opportunity is taken to interest pupils in learning. In one residential house at supper-time an adult had children enthralled by a game of spelling and addition imaginatively undertaken with pupils acting as secret agents working out the password to leave the dining room. Pupils' successes, however small, are celebrated and their self-esteem and confidence builds as a result.
9. The school sets high expectations for pupils' behaviour and has a variety of strategies to achieve them. Newer pupils often find the transition from the houses to school very difficult and can exhibit quite challenging behaviour. To minimise this they have breakfast in class groups rather than in the house and they are brought over in small numbers so that the extent of the transition is reduced and the working day starts calmly. Teaching and care staff apply the same standards throughout the school and these are applied sensitively but firmly. As a result, pupils' behaviour shows clear progression as they move through the school. Those in the final year are often polite, well behaved and willing to take on responsibilities. The system of rewards and sanctions is well understood by pupils and the weekly award of certificates for improvement and good work are greeted with real enthusiasm.
10. Pupils' development of self-knowledge and spiritual awareness is excellent. The therapeutic support pupils receive focuses on pupils' knowledge of themselves and their relationships with others. Throughout the day, in lessons and in residence, pupils are asked to reflect quietly on their feelings and the results of their actions. When they return to their houses at the end of the day the whole group discuss the successes and difficulties they have encountered. As a result, they learn the principles of right and wrong and how these apply to their lives in a community. They are constantly encouraged to consider how they should respect the feelings and beliefs of others. Racism is understood to be unacceptable. The school council asked that they should attend meetings where a pupil has been involved in a racist incident to show that the other pupils will not accept racism.. Throughout the year the festivals of other religions are celebrated in school. During the inspection, a high quality assembly had pupils acting out the story of Diwali followed by an ex-member of staff in Indian national dress describing how the festival is celebrated in the home. Pupils marvelled at this and were engrossed in the activity, listening intently and in awe of the symbolism identified.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2004 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	NA*	School data	NA*

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.
Not applicable – non-maintained residential special schools are not required to submit data on daily attendance

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. This is mainly because of the exceptional strengths in the care provided and the excellent support for pupils' needs. In addition, the contribution made by the '24 hour curriculum' (through the early morning, school day, evenings and weekends) very strongly supports pupils' learning and achievement. The very good links with

parents and good links with the community very effectively contribute to the pupils' education and personal development. The quality of the teaching and learning is good and is supported by the good range of learning opportunities provided.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is good and has some very good features. Pupils learn well as a result. The assessment of the pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding and the progress they make is very good. The use of this assessment to respond to individual needs is also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of staff performance, teaching has improved and, staff constantly seek to improve their skills.
- Staff build pupils' self-esteem through highly interesting activities which are carefully planned so that pupils gain success.
- The considerable praise and encouragement given to pupils make them feel good about themselves and try harder with their work.
- Teachers' and assistants' excellent insistence on high standards of behaviour and high expectations generally leads to pupils maximising their learning and achieving very well.
- Teachers plan lessons very well with clear objectives which are shared with pupils.
- Teachers work hard to ensure that all pupils are included in lessons; they plan well for their particular needs and carefully consider the best ways in which they learn.
- Assessment procedures and the use of the information gained are very good; those in relation to pupils' personal, social and emotional development are excellent.
- Occasionally, changes of activity during lessons and between lessons, slow the pace, disrupt pupils' attention and result in a loss of focus on learning.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 28 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
0	12	13	3	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. The table above shows a significant improvement on the teaching seen in the last inspection with the proportions of good and very good teaching showing a marked increase. The school's monitoring and evaluation systems for teaching are strong and these and the performance management systems have resulted in improved teaching. Teachers reflect very well on how they can improve their teaching and their evaluation of lessons and pupils' learning leads to plans which are adjusted very carefully to meet pupils' needs.
12. Teaching is very good in English and ICT. Very good attention is given to the pupils' individual needs and especially to their literacy skills. Communication skills are very well taught. They are very well supported through work in other subjects, such as in PSHE, and the opportunities to speak in front of a large audience; for example, in role-play during assembly. The support they get gives them considerable confidence in reading and writing and markedly enhances their self-esteem. In ICT, the one-to-one support the teacher gives utilises his expert knowledge and the encouraging approach helps pupils believe in themselves and gives them the self-assurance to try things out, even though they might make mistakes. The skills they have developed mean that they are now able to rectify mistakes easily and they realise that ICT is a medium where changes to work can be easily undertaken. Teaching is good in

mathematics, science, religious education and in the few lessons seen in the taught programme for PSHE.

13. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and of the pupils' special educational needs. This helps them plan well for their individual needs and they take very good account of the targets set for pupils. Pupils are clear about what they are learning; objectives are shared with pupils and teachers ensure that activities are very well matched to the pupils' age and stage as well as their emotional and learning needs. The general planning for subjects that teachers work from usually provides only one objective per lesson; however, using their knowledge of pupils they plan effectively for the different groups. This ensures that pupils have work which is well matched to their needs and existing skills and, despite their severe emotional and behaviour difficulties that they learn effectively. Good attention is paid to pupils' differing styles of learning and lessons are reasonably well balanced with teachers using visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic approaches in their introductions and demonstrations. Teachers are beginning to make use of ICT to do this and an interactive whiteboard has been purchased. More boards are planned and there is a recognition that these can provide highly motivating starts to lessons, which can engage pupils sometimes more effectively than more traditional methods.
14. Together with the very committed teaching assistants, teachers manage pupils' behaviour excellently. Each class has its own individual reward system and pupils value this highly, working hard to gain points. Nevertheless, the way that pupils' behaviour is dealt with is very consistent across the school. Staff endeavour to calm pupils, talk with them about their difficulties, but remain firm in their resolve. They are highly sensitive to pupils' situations and any changes or stress they are going through; however, this is not accepted as an excuse for unacceptable behaviour. Sometimes, it is necessary to call upon external support and the staff from the Shifford support team work highly effectively to deal with difficult behaviour. They do this either by supporting pupils in class or calming pupils in their work area. Pupils, on the whole, are returned quickly to class to carry on with their work. As pupils progress through their emotional difficulties and become more mature, they begin to remove themselves from situations, take time out and return quickly. The school operates a system where pupils make up time after school time when they have been removed from class during the day. The net effect of all this, is that the time lost from learning for the individual pupils causing problems, those removed from class and the remaining pupils is considerably minimised.
15. The pace of lessons is often swift and activities are highly motivating and maintain pupils' interest. Sometimes, the different sections of the lesson are not always linked in such a way that ensures a smooth transition from one part to next. As a result, the pace slows and pupils become unsettled. Teachers quickly regain their interest and involvement but, nevertheless, if resources were organised in a different way or activities were designed to link from one part to the next more smoothly, then the time available for learning would be maximised. In addition, times for pupil transfer from school to residence and residence to school could be better timed and organised. Sometimes, residential staff collect pupils from the end of morning or day session at different times and this weakens the end of morning / day reflection / review period. These are potentially excellent sessions which seek to evaluate the pupils' performance over a period of time and include pupil self-assessment. In one such example, a considerably calm atmosphere had been created and sensitive self- review discussions were taking place. Pupils were thinking clearly how they could do things better and were concentrating superbly, taking turns and listening very carefully to others. However, the mood of the session and the pupils' concentration was spoiled when residential staff came into lessons to collect pupils one by one and some even held conversation with pupils while the teacher was continuing to direct the session.

16. Assessment procedures have improved well since the last inspection. There are now effective procedures for reviewing and monitoring pupils' progress in all subjects. These are very effective in relation to target setting for the school and for individuals. In subjects such as English, numeracy and ICT very strong baseline measures are taken when pupils enter the school. This ensures that those who have particular needs in these areas have targeted support in the form of a basic skills plan that addresses these needs. Parents and carers and all other staff including residential staff are very well involved in supporting these and all pupils' literacy, numeracy and IEP targets. Assessment in English and mathematics is very good overall. Regular case reviews and day-to-day observations mean that any difficulties are picked up very early and responded to. Assessment in other subjects is good, although in some subjects such as science, the criteria used to distinguish the 'sub levels' (the differentiated performance criteria – P scales) of National Curriculum assessments are not always used. This would make target setting and evaluation of progress more meaningful for some pupils and the tracking of progress even finer.
17. Teachers have a very strong understanding of what pupils know and understand and can do, particularly in relation to their literacy and numeracy skills, their personal, social and emotional development and specific special educational needs. Good profiles of pupils' work have been built up and those in relation to their personal skills and development are excellent. There is an exceptional system of internal and external case conferences that ensures that pupils' progress in relation to their particular difficulties is comprehensively reviewed. These discussions result in highly effective practice being developed to meet their needs. The assessments provided for these in terms of formal assessments, observational records and ongoing records are very good and very strong reports are provided by all teams. These ensure pupils' needs are met very well and support their progress in all aspects of their development and learning. The targets and plans that arise from these, including the IEPs ensure everyone is clear about what is now being prioritised for a child and what will happen next. Pupils and carers/ parents are involved well in this.

The curriculum

Overall the curriculum provision is very good and this is an improvement since the last inspection. The 24 hour nature of the school's provision means that the opportunities to support pupils' personal and academic development are very good overall. It also ensures that the opportunities provided to enrich pupils' learning further are also very good. The school provides a broad range of academic learning opportunities which are well planned to meet the diverse and complex needs of the pupils. The quality of the accommodation is generally good and improving, while resources to meet the needs of pupils are also good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The academic curriculum is broad and balanced, contains the National Curriculum and reflects well the aims of the school.
- The number, experience and expertise of all staff to meet the wide and complex needs of pupils are very good resulting in the school providing very good learning opportunities for pupils.
- The excellent provision for supporting pupils' personal development has a significant impact on their development.
- Curriculum development is good with the introduction of new policies and an increasing role for subject co-ordinators since the last inspection.

Commentary

18. The school provides a rich and relevant curriculum which motivates pupils and enables them to take full advantage of the learning opportunities presented during the school day and outside lessons. The pupils are taught all subjects of the National Curriculum together with religious education and personal, social and health education. It develops in pupils an

eagerness to learn and ensures their special educational needs are comprehensively met. Consequently, pupils have access to the full curriculum which meets their needs. The school constantly reviews and modifies pupils' targets in the light of their educational and social progress and plans and adapts its curricular opportunities to maximise learning. There are good medium-term plans in place now for all subjects and, although some subjects such as humanities and religious education are taught on a modular basis, a topic based approach ensures that skills linked to these are built on and considered throughout the year. There is a distinct curriculum cycle which is monitored carefully to ensure that as pupils change groups their curricular experiences are built on well.

19. The curriculum is socially inclusive with very good extra-curricular activities that enable pupils to enrich their experience beyond lessons. The curriculum is further enhanced by contributions from individuals and groups outside the school. The curriculum is well integrated and is adapted well by staff to take account of pupils' individual needs and targets identified in individual education plans. Pupils achieve very well in relation to these, as a consequence. The curriculum is further enhanced and supported by visits to or from a raft of linked professionals such as the nurse, educational psychologists and the school's own therapeutic staff. Carefully thought-out practical activities and visits are provided to exemplify key concepts within subjects, such as world religions in religious education or rivers in geography, which both motivate pupils and enable each to understand at their different level.
20. The provision for pupils' additional special educational needs is strong, particularly in relation to support for pupils' additional literacy and numeracy difficulties, where it is very strong. All pupils arrive with severe emotional difficulties and some require individual therapeutic support. This sometimes necessitates that individuals are withdrawn from lessons. Occasionally, the arrangements mean that pupils sometimes miss the same lessons each week.
21. The school's provision for pupils' personal, social and health development is a significant strength of the school. This excellent provision results in the very good relationships within the whole of the school community. It is much wider than the very good planned, taught educational programme for PSHE and embodies all that is done in therapy, in residence and with the family team. Pupils respond very well to the positive and nurturing atmosphere of the school which allows them to develop confidence and self-worth and to become happier and more assured. The work of the school council enhances pupils' self-esteem enabling them to understand that they can become contributors to the community by debating school issues in a democratic forum.
22. The school has strong links with the local community and encourages visits such as adults from other cultures, for example, at Diwali and Hanukkah. This is further enhanced by the school's participation in visits and outdoor education, for example, the "outward bound" trip to Rhos-y-Gwaliau.
23. The staffing is very good. The match between the numbers, qualifications and experience of teachers to the needs of the pupils and the National Curriculum is very good and they provide pupils with very good learning opportunities and experiences. The teachers are well supported by other staff who are both very experienced and well trained. A very effective programme of continuing professional development and a comprehensive induction programme for new staff enables all staff to improve their effectiveness.
24. The accommodation is well suited to meet the needs of the pupils and some parts of it, still under development, will provide very good facilities. However, at the time of the inspection not all the building work had been completed and accommodation for physical education, for example, remains unsatisfactory. Some classroom space is cramped and poorly ventilated and the library which is partially a teaching area, is a thoroughfare. The school has plans to re-

organise the way adults move through the school once the sports hall is completed. The school uses outside facilities well to enhance teaching and learning; for example, the swimming pool at the local camp site and local playing fields and playgrounds supplement the schools' own provision. Resources are well matched to meet the needs of the National Curriculum, although some materials are well-used and more up-to-date equipment, such as ICT, could be incorporated in some subjects.

Care, guidance and support

The care, welfare, health and safety are good overall. The school's provision of support, advice and guidance is excellent. The school seeks and acts upon pupils' views well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils receive excellent support and advice based on continuous monitoring and meticulous record keeping.
- Excellent trusting relationships exist between pupils and staff.
- Induction arrangements are excellent, ensuring pupils quickly settle into the school.
- There is an effective school council which represents pupils' views very well.

Commentary

25. This is a school where the care of individual children is at the heart of everything that it does. The induction arrangements are excellent and greatly appreciated by all parents. A team from the school meets with social workers from the local authority concerned plus other professionals involved and this is followed by a home visit by the school's director who produces a detailed assessment. There are home visits by the family team and visits to the school by parents or carers. At their initial visit to the school the child is matched to an existing pupil who acts as a 'buddy'. On arrival there is a "Getting to know you" meeting when child and parent are supported to ensure that the introduction to the school is achieved with the minimum of stress. Daily staff meetings and a formal review at six weeks ensure that all aspects of the process are carefully implemented and monitored.
26. The school works very well to safeguard the welfare of pupils. Procedures to ensure that pupils work in a healthy and safe environment are satisfactory. Risk assessments are in place for most activities. These are not always formally in place for individual pupils, although the information in the pupils' individual record would inform staff of possible risks. In addition, a small number of other health and safety issues and related matters were discussed with the school.
27. Child protection procedures are excellent and fully in place with all teaching, care and support staff recently receiving training by an external consultant. There are thorough systems for the control of prescription medicines. There are detailed medical records which are immediately available in the case of an emergency. Systems for maintaining the buildings are very good with most repairs done quickly by the school's own maintenance team.
28. From induction to transfer the school monitors carefully and thoughtfully every aspect of a child's life in school and any factor outside school which might affect them. Regular daily meetings between care and teaching staff build on the quick briefings whenever a child passes between various staff during the school day or in the residential houses. As a result, staff have a highly detailed picture of each child and the issues affecting them and this informs the timely and practical support and advice given to pupils. Strategies for dealing with inappropriate behaviour are constantly reviewed, often with the help of a consultant psychotherapist. The consistent approach and underlying care result in exceptional trusting relationships being developed between pupils and both care and teaching and support staff. In a very small number of instances, where pupils have delayed speech and language

development there is limited speech and language support available to support their needs. However, the school works well with local health trust provision where this is available.

29. The views of pupils are constantly sought by the staff dealing with them and at the end of every session they are asked to reflect on their achievements and anything that caused a problem. The school council is drawn from pupils in their last year. During the inspection they spoke enthusiastically about their roles in the group. They were proud of the responsibility placed upon them and were clear on the need to represent the views of the whole school. They felt 'listened to' and felt they had a 'say' in the running of the school.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has very good links with parents and carers. There are very good links with the local community which greatly extend the opportunities for pupils. The school has good links with other schools, particularly the Dunmore Primary School, enabling pupils to experience mainstream education.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good links are maintained with parents and carers by a dedicated family team.
- The very good links with the local community greatly extend their learning and social development.
- The school works very well with parents, local authorities and parents to ensure pupils' smooth transfer their next phase of education.
- Pupils' academic and personal development is greatly enhanced by the very good link with a local mainstream primary school.

Commentary

30. The partnership with parents and carers is very good. The school works closely with parents and carers through a dedicated family team. The team maintains regular contact with parents and carers throughout a child's stay at the school and in many cases for six months after the child has left. Home visits, no matter where pupils live in the country, are made before entry and then at least once a term. This provides a wealth of information for the school and substantial support to the parents. This greatly helps parents and foster parents support pupils' learning during holiday breaks spent at home. As a result, all those who replied to the inspection parent survey stated that they were comfortable about approaching the school about any problem and that their views were sought and acted upon. Any problems are, therefore, quickly and effectively dealt with.
31. General information that parents receive is good, although the quality of reports about pupils' progress is of very high quality. These documents provide parents with a very thorough analysis of their child's strength and weaknesses and areas for improvement. Parents receive good annual reports which provide a broad picture of their child's progress. In addition, they receive copies of the annual pupil review document which, although intended for a wider audience, gives an exceptionally high level of detail covering all aspects of academic and personal development. The family team are then available to discuss any questions with parents. A newsletter is produced each term which gives a picture of life in each of the houses in a friendly magazine format. The school's website is attractive and highly informative.
32. Links with the community are very strong and the school makes great efforts to be seen as part of the village within which it is situated. The links with the community have a significant impact on pupils' social and cultural development. The local caravan site provides its indoor swimming pool for the school to use. Pupils' experience and social development are greatly enhanced by their involvement in a wide variety of local youth groups and clubs such as gymnastics and Sea Scouts, Brownies and Guides. Pupils regularly visit the local shop and the village park. Each year the school hosts an open day for local people. They are also invited to attend the school's firework display when pupils act as hosts. There are close links with the local church where major services such as Christmas are celebrated. The vicar also visits the school to take part in services and lessons and to provide support to the staff. The local police officer has lunch with a group every two weeks and takes an after school club every week.
33. At the time of transfer the school works very well with parents, local authorities, other schools and institutions across a very large geographical area. Detailed information is provided enabling those concerned to make informed decisions about the child's next stage of education. Throughout the school the aim is to get as many pupils as possible into mainstream education although other provisions are not seen as failure but different pathways for such disturbed pupils. The school also provides six months of further support after transfer.

34. Overall, the school has good links with other schools and colleges. There are links to local schools and to other similar schools across the country. There are international education links with the school seen as a source of knowledge and good practice. There is a very strong link with a local large state primary school. This enables pupils to attend mainstream lessons which greatly enhance their preparation for the subsequent stages of their education. Both schools use the contact as an opportunity for enhancing children's personal development.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are very good. The director, headteacher and all senior managers provide very strong leadership and highly effective management. Together with the trustees they have a very clear, shared vision and very high aspirations for everything that the school does. The work of the trustees is very good. They fulfil their responsibilities and role very well and provide much valued support and insight into the school's work.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- All aspects of the school's work are led and managed highly effectively and the headteacher and director oversee this very well indeed.
- Trustees are very supportive of the work of the school; they know its strengths very well and the challenges that it faces.
- The school is very strongly self-reflective; the various management teams, including the family team, residential and education teams constantly challenge themselves as to whether the provision for individuals and in general could be improved further.
- Leadership and management of the curriculum are good; subject leaders have an increasingly effective role in leading and managing their subjects.
- The opportunities for staff training are very good and there are very effective systems in place for teachers' performance management and staff appraisal.
- The school development plan is a strongly reflective document, and is underpinned very well by departmental and subject development planning, although, in some, timescales are unclear
- Financial management is very good; a very close watch is kept on the school's budget and the priorities identified in the development plan and business plan are thoughtfully costed.

Commentary

35. This is a very well led and managed school in which senior managers and the trustees have created an excellent ethos. It is a highly complex organisation in which each department has its own senior management team which reviews, develops and manages its work very well. The overall management team includes the headteacher and the director who provide very strong leadership and a very clear vision as to the school's purpose and future. There is excellent liaison between the cross-departmental groups and a system of case conferences ensures very effective whole school policy making, revisions to practice and excellent co-ordination of care for the individual. There is a strong element of reflection at all levels, whether by an individual team at the end of the day or when teams meet to review behaviour management or individual cases. This reflection stems from a clear ethos of 'what can we do to help this child further, is there anything we are doing that is not helpful?' rather than one that centres solely on factors within the child. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.
36. Mulberry Bush's development planning mirrors this concern for the individual in both its detail and in broader issues. There is an overarching development plan which summarises whole school priorities. This is underpinned by very good detailed departmental development plans and plans related to whole school issues. Regular meetings of relevant groups ensure the plans are very well monitored. It is a highly effective system which, coupled with the performance management system, drives improvement at all levels and ensures staff are clear

about what the school has prioritised and wants them to do. Subject co-ordinators' roles have improved since the last inspection and all are now involved in monitoring their subject through planning and observation of teaching, although this is not fully implemented for subjects other than English, mathematics and science. Most keep good quality co-ordinator files and have clear development plans for their subjects, although these do not always show how the actions taken will improve standards in the subject

37. The trustees oversee the school's work very well. This is a very effective group which knows the school's work thoroughly. Trustees bring a very wide range of important expertise to the school which strengthen it further. Although they are not directly involved in school improvement planning until the final stages, the system of reporting, visits and informal discussions with senior management mean that they understand the school's strengths, what it is prioritising and how it is progressing towards its targets, very well indeed.
38. This is a school which supports its staff very well through training, excellent relationships, teamwork and therapy opportunities. Training builds staff confidence and expertise very well. Induction arrangements for new staff are excellent and all staff are clear as to their importance both in individual pupils' programmes and to the school.

Financial information

Financial information for the year September 2003 to August 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,937,566	Balance from previous year	-39,484
Total expenditure	2,736,975	Balance carried forward to the next	161,107
Expenditure per pupil	88,290		

39. Planning and management of finances are very good. The school is well placed to support its capital building projects and to resource and fund priorities for development each year. The amount spent on staffing and learning resources within the school is very high. New technologies and financial resources have been effectively used to the pupils' advantage. The trustees, director and headteacher ensure that finances are used prudently by effectively applying well the principles of challenge, comparison, consultation and competition. The school's income and expenditure are very carefully monitored with regular, detailed financial statements.

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

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 1 and 2

ENGLISH

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well from their starting points, particularly in reading and in their attitudes to all aspects of their English.
- Assessment in English is very good and supports staff planning and teaching of work in ways very closely linked to pupils' particular needs.
- The recent introduction of a commercial reading, spelling and writing scheme has further strengthened the English curriculum and is already raising pupils' confidence and skills.
- Reading is very well supported in all subjects but more creative writing opportunities could be provided in some classes.
- ICT is used well to support teaching and learning in reading and spelling and for word processing; it is not used sufficiently to enable lower attainers in particular to be freer and more independent writers.

Commentary

40. Pupils' achievements are very good because of the very good teaching and the very strong range of opportunities they have to learn. Since the last inspection, the provision has improved well. On entry to the school pupils' attainment in English is often low because of their learning difficulties and their patchy attendance previously. Some have very specific literacy difficulties. Pupils' skills are assessed carefully by the educational psychologist and a specific literacy plan put into place if necessary. These, and pupils' speaking and listening skills are supported very well by staff in the residences as well as in lessons. Very good day-to-day records are kept of pupils' responses to lessons and their reading and writing progress. Examples of pupils' work are regularly collected and their achievements analysed through the case conference system. The English co-ordinator monitors standards across the school very effectively. All this, and the way in which teachers plan mean that work is adapted well to pupils' needs, pupils know how they are doing and their progress is maximised.
41. Teaching and learning of reading are particularly strong and achievement is very good and sometimes exceptional in this area. Reading and spelling skills are very systematically built on and this has been strengthened through the adoption of a commercial scheme. Pupils enjoy the raps and some of the predictability of the routines very much. Computers are used very well to reinforce reading skills and spelling rules and to boost pupils' confidence. Many reading opportunities have been built into the day and all staff use these very well. Almost all pupils talked with say that they now enjoy reading and feel that they can now 'do' it. Some volunteer that their reading skills have really improved since they came to the school. A good range of stories and non-fiction material, including 'big books' are explored with the pupils who enjoy the many opportunities they are given to join in and discuss what is being read. By the time they leave the school, all pupils have made very good progress in reading from their starting points and some read fluently, with expression, and have skills that support their learning in other subjects very well. Most read simple texts fluently and a few write freely and confidently. However, although handwriting skills are well developed and progress in writing overall is good, the lowest attainers do not have sufficient access to different ways of using ICT for supporting their independent writing. They do, however, make good progress in their

spelling and in writing simple responses to questions or filling in missing words. Higher attainers write good accounts of stories they have heard and use simple dictionaries and thesauruses well.

42. Pupils make very good progress in their speaking and listening, in their self-expression and responsiveness to others' ideas. They listen increasingly carefully to their teachers and are keen to share their work. They generally take good care with its presentation. In line with their difficulties, some pupils find it hard initially to take others' ideas into account, but this improves over time. By the time they leave the school, most listen well to each other and take their listener's needs into account more effectively. They explain their work with confidence, using relevant vocabulary such as *thesaurus*, *dictionary*, *author* and *illustrator*. Others, who have more delayed speech and language skills on entering the school, make sound and often good progress and staff make good use of any speech and language therapy support to help meet their needs. However, this is limited and more pupils would benefit from such support.
43. Teaching and learning are very strong in English. Staff teams work very well together and all have had training in the new literacy approach. They plan very carefully to meet individual pupils' needs and present their lessons in lively and imaginative ways that engage pupils' interest. Work is adjusted very well to support the learning of the different groups and teaching assistants are used very well to achieve this. Teachers, themselves, are very good listeners and model this well to pupils. The school's points system motivates pupils very well. The focus on pupils asking themselves how well they have done and to give reasons for their responses helps them to monitor and carefully consider their own actions, both with regard to what they have learned in English but also in relation to their behaviour. Staff follow the structure of the literacy hour in varying ways but all components are addressed and objectives are shared well with pupils. Very good use of drama and role-play involves pupils further, and also reinforces key vocabulary and themes for them.
44. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The co-ordinator has worked well with other staff to develop and secure the curriculum in individual classes, and now monitors teaching and supports medium-term planning well. A strong development plan is in place with a clear link to supporting and improving pupil achievement. Resources are good and new purchases and an increasing range of relevant software ensure that a range of ways are available to support teaching and learning. The school has, for example, recently acquired a range of software which it intends to use to support story telling/ writing and sequencing skills. Currently the library, although bright and well resourced is a thoroughfare and this inhibits its effectiveness as a teaching resource. However, staff do use it well, both for supporting interest in books and for small group work such as story telling. New building work will soon enable the library to be used more effectively

Literacy across the curriculum

45. Literacy and speaking and listening are supported very well in all aspects of the school's life, including the residences. Very strong opportunities are provided in subjects such as history, geography, religious education and science for pupils to record what they have done, to write simple accounts of what they have learned or to build up sentences. They make very good attempts, for example, to read from simple text books when asked to do so by their teachers. In a history lesson, very good support for research skills, for listening and for key vocabulary work was seen as pupils listened to and watched a video about ancient Egypt and jotted down key facts.

MATHEMATICS

The provision for mathematics is **good** with some very good features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and support by other staff in classrooms result in pupils being well motivated and wanting to learn.
- Work is well planned in individual lessons and good use is made of the National Numeracy Strategy in this planning.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics and assessment is also good; medium-term planning, however, does not always match the grouping of pupils.
- The subject co-ordinator leads and manages the subject well, monitors both the teaching and learning and ensures a full range of learning opportunities is provided.

Commentary

46. The attainment of pupils is generally below average for their ages; nevertheless, their achievement is good and sometimes very good. Lessons are planned to the three part structure of the National Numeracy Strategy and this, together with the high quality of support by teaching assistants, has a positive effect on pupils' achievements. Improvement in provision has been good since the last inspection and teaching quality has improved considerably; overall it is good or better. The pace of lessons is good and well geared to the needs and abilities of individual pupils. Teachers have a clear and profound understanding of the needs of pupils, managing behaviour exceptionally well and thus promoting in pupils a readiness to learn.
47. Teachers and support staff challenge pupils and ensure that all can access the work. However, on occasions, because pupils attend for individual therapeutic support at the same time each week they miss out on some mathematical experiences. Work matches pupils' needs very well both in terms of the National Curriculum and in relation to IEP and basic skills plan targets. The use of ICT is well established within mathematics, but greater use could be made of a wider range of software. Although resources are adequate to meet the demands of the curriculum, some equipment is a little worn and a wider range of brighter, stronger, concrete materials could enhance learning still further. Lessons are well planned and match the concentration spans and needs of the pupils well. The outstanding feature of teaching is the extensive knowledge and insight staff display in relation to individual special needs.
48. In general pupils enjoy their work and co-operate well with the adults around them and work productively. Generally work is well presented and pupils take a pride in their achievements. They are keen to work, but occasionally, because of their special educational needs, find it difficult to work co-operatively with others.
49. The leadership of the subject by a fully committed senior teacher is very good. The co-ordinator manages the subject well monitoring the performance of both teachers and pupils well. Teaching and learning is systematically monitored and well evaluated. The subject leader provides very good support to his colleagues. Recording and assessment procedures are good and the co-ordinator "keeps his eye well on the ball" to ensure full coverage of National Curriculum attainment targets.

Mathematics across the curriculum

50. The use of mathematics in other subjects is good. The structure of the curriculum, with its emphasis on termly themes, ensures that mathematics contributes to the full curriculum. This

is not only by its use in other subjects, for example, measuring and estimating in food technology or in the use of co-ordinates in geography, but also by using other subjects within mathematics. For example by taking pyramids from work in history, staff focus on their properties and go on to use this work as a start of the construction of simple histograms.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The co-ordinator has worked hard to raise the profile of science in the school.
- Time for learning is supported by the school's approach to topics and aspects of science occur in a range of subjects.
- Planning has been revised and has led to more opportunities for pupils to make better progress.
- Teachers' questioning is strong and guidance by staff results in pupils' improved investigative skills.
- Sometimes 'transitions', the change of activity during the lessons and to the next lesson, are not always smooth and this disrupts pupils' learning.
- Teachers use ICT is sound but more opportunities need to be provided.

Commentary

51. The science co-ordinator, who was new to the post shortly after the last inspection, has worked well to improve provision and in 2002 it was a key focus for the school's development. She leads and manages the subject well, successfully maintaining the profile of science at a high level. This has had a positive impact on teacher's knowledge, especially on investigation and experimentation. Assessment is now strong. Pupils' progress is tracked well, although this is by the broad National Curriculum levels and not by more detailed criteria as in English and mathematics. Pupils' results in science are higher than in English and mathematics by Year 6 and some pupils reach the expected level and above. Although the number of the school's pupils actually taking the national test in Year 6 is small, the results are often above national figures for EBD schools.
52. Although the time for learning science appears less than that usually seen in mainstream school, the way the school tackles its planning, especially in the foundation classes, means that topics planned often include science. The amount of this varies, but staff are careful to identify the science links and the learning objectives in their planning.
53. The school's baseline assessment often indicates that pupils show a great interest in science and the things around them. The school successfully builds on this and works particularly hard to develop pupils' investigative skills; this is done systematically, so that pupils develop a good understanding of what constitutes a fair test and older pupils can identify the key features to include when designing an investigation. The co-ordinator's effective monitoring of pupils' work, teachers' planning and of teaching itself indicates that pupils' learn well; this is because of the systematic planning which build on their previous learning in small steps. Pupils achieve well as a result. It is clear from lesson observations that pupils gain a great deal from the 'discoveries' they make. Some are amazed by these and a Year 7 pupil working on an investigation into electrical conductivity marvelled at the way the graphite in a pencil completed a circuit to make a bulb light. Pupils are often very keen and take great pride in communicating what they know and have found out.
54. The quality of the teaching is good. Lessons are usually well prepared in the main with interesting work which motivates the pupils. Pupils enthusiastically carry out their work and diligently test and record. They are clear about what they are doing and learning because this has been shared and discussed with them by the teacher at the start of lessons. Teaching

assistants are clear about their role in the main parts of lessons and support pupils very well. They could be used more effectively at the start of lessons, for recording pupils' responses or introducing a topic to a younger age group, for instance. All staff are careful to guide pupils through the investigative processes and the very good use of probing questions is particularly successful in enabling pupils to think and discover for themselves.

55. Staff manage pupils very well indeed; they continue to work well with pupils, encouraging them, even though one or two others may have outbursts of temper for no apparent reason. This means that any 'outbursts' are short lived and the usual calm of lessons is restored quickly. However, sometimes changes of activity within lessons are not always as 'slick' as they could be. This is usually related to the need to provide resources for the next part. These are often given out to pupils one by one. This causes the usually swift pace and momentum of the lesson to be reduced. Pupils' noise levels rise as a result and sometimes a few pupils become restless. Teachers are very adept at bringing the pupils back on track and gaining their attention quickly but, nevertheless, time is lost as a consequence.
56. Teachers plan their work well, according to the pupils' needs and ages. Specific subject vocabulary is well emphasised and pupils are encouraged to use this when explaining findings or giving scientific reasons why things have happened. This results in their improved understanding of scientific ideas and a confidence in speaking in front of others. Although the medium-term planning only identifies one objective per lesson for the whole age range, staff recognise that this has to be modified and undertake this well. This is because they know their pupils exceptionally well and when they plan for their learning needs they very carefully take into account their emotional needs. The co-ordinator has identified the need for more precise planning and is looking at published materials to help teachers plan more easily.
57. Resources for learning are good and sound use is made of ICT. The school has its own data logging equipment which is beginning to be used to measure change, such as the temperature of liquids. In a lesson on teeth, pupils were enthralled when using the computer microscope to examine features of different teeth. Some use is made of ICT to support learning and school has a reasonable amount of CD ROMs and network software, although the co-ordinator recognises that much more use could be made of these.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in ICT is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Thorough planning, and the co-ordinator's expert knowledge, has ensured that the subject has developed well.
- The teachers' approach and the way work is planned means that pupils learn very well in ICT and can deal successfully with programs when things go wrong.
- Opportunities to support the learning of pupils' skills in ICT and of the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is satisfactory but needs extending.

Commentary

58. The school's has made good improvement in its ICT provision since the last inspection. The highly knowledgeable co-ordinator has taken on an extended role since then. He is now not only responsible for teaching and co-ordination the subject, but is also responsible for the management of ICT, technical support and the training of staff across the whole establishment, including administration. He has made a significant contribution to the development of the infra-structure of the school's network and to the smooth running of ICT across the school. The financing of developments has been in line with the school's plan and

the number of computers has increased. These are adequate in number and are based in classrooms, residences and the school's library. There is no computer suite at present, although as space becomes freed up, a small suite is planned, which can be used for staff and pupils.

59. A comprehensive long-term plan to guide the development of the subject and the provision for management information systems is comprehensive, well considered and thorough. Occasionally, the intended impact on pupils and how the outcome of the action will be measured, however, is too general. The planning for the subject is now based on a considerably adapted published scheme which better covers all aspects of the National Curriculum programme of study than the school's previous plans. A wide range of good quality software which is 'child friendly' but challenging has been purchased. Pupils' attainment is regularly assessed and tracked on well thought out 'tracking sheets'. Teachers' knowledge and confidence have grown considerably; the co-ordinator recognises that the training of the recently appointed teaching assistants and support staff needs now take place so they can help pupils more effectively.
60. The school has experimented to find the best approach to teaching ICT and the co-ordinator now systematically teaches most pupils on an individual basis. Although this is a very time consuming method, it is also very successful and pupils' progress, since this way of working has been introduced, is very good. Some pupils who have been in the school over a long period are taught in pairs and were seen working very co-operatively. Pupils' attitudes to the subject and their response in lessons are very good and sometimes excellent. Small group teaching in the past, where pupils had to wait their turn on the computer and for the teacher's attention is reported by the school to have been less successful and a reason why pupils' progress previously has only been satisfactory.
61. Pupils' achievement is now good overall. Those seen working during the inspection were learning very well and the gains they have made in their knowledge, skills and understanding since the new system of working has been introduced, has been very good. Pupils build well on their previous knowledge in small, successful steps and gain confidence in trying out new ideas. They are not afraid of trying and this is a key reason why they are making such good progress at present. Some reach high levels and carry out work which is at or above the expected level for their age in some areas. For instance, pupils were competently tackling the ideas involved in object based drawing and realised the need to identify the order in which objects need to be placed. Even the newest and most vulnerable pupils enjoy the attention of the one-to-one support because their efforts are valued. In a lesson with a relatively new pupil, the experience of using the digital camera and being able to see the completed result quickly ensured that the pupil's efforts were rewarded and the achievement visible to her.
62. Many pupils have experienced considerable failure in their previous placements; at Mulberry they are encouraged to try hard, work hard and do their best. At the heart of the very good teaching is the teachers' way of giving the pupils the confidence to succeed. The work is often planned in very small steps so that there is little chance of failure at first. As pupils gain their skills, they are given strategies to deal with mistakes and know that if something goes wrong it can nearly always be rectified. Teaching carefully guides them to the steps of retrieval when this happens. This minimises frustration and alleviates one of the major barriers to their learning. As a result, the pupils tackle work confidently and 'believe in themselves'. It bolsters their self-esteem and their tolerance in ways which meet their special educational needs very well. There is a good balance between the teacher telling pupils what to do and reliance on their own knowledge. There is much verbal and visual reinforcement and the approaches accommodate well the ways that pupils' learn best.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

63. The pupils' ICT skills are mostly reinforced through using the Internet for research on a particular topic or by using simple programs, such as in English and mathematics. Teachers are beginning to plan for the use of software as part of their lessons, although there is a narrow range of programs to support subjects. Overall, the use of ICT to support learning varies; most staff most recognise they need to use it more to support subjects effectively. The co-ordinator liaises closely with staff and identifies the skills that pupils will be learning in their lessons. However, pupils do not always get the opportunity to reinforce these each week. There is little use by teachers of software for demonstration / modelling in lessons, particularly to help those pupils who are visual learners and reinforce their learning through pupils' participation in this process. However, an interactive whiteboard has just been purchased and more such purchases are planned.

HUMANITIES

64. **History** and **geography** were both sampled. Insufficient teaching was seen during the inspection to report fully on either subject. Both these subjects are taught as part of humanities provision, through topics and in rotation. However, stories and non-fiction work in English and in subjects such as religious education often have geography and history links and this supports pupils' achievements further. The subjects have improved satisfactorily since the last inspection. In the lessons observed teaching and learning were good and sometimes very good. Where it was very good teachers used lively ways such as dressing up and role-play, as for example, in a lesson about Guy Fawkes. They also had lots of artefacts to engage pupil interest. In these lessons pupils watched well, were keen to contribute what they knew and were really enthused about the topic. Sometimes, as in a geography lesson, although teaching was satisfactory, pupils were restless because the resources used or teaching approach did not 'grab their attention' initially.
65. Pupils' work and records show achievements are generally good in these subjects. In geography, good use of the locality supports pupils' growing awareness of the main features of the geography of the area and their work on rivers, pollution and so on. In history, the oldest pupils identify and understand the difference between and purpose of different Egyptian monuments and understand basic facts about ancient Egyptian life. A range of books and ICT resources is used well to develop pupils' research skills and teachers' very good knowledge of the pupils ensures literacy skills are appropriately supported. The curriculum provided builds steadily on previous knowledge, experience and skills, through a two or three year topic approach which also looks carefully at the geography or historical skills to be learned. Assessment, record keeping and reports usually illustrate well the skills and knowledge pupils have gained over time, although, occasionally, they concentrate more on what the pupil has taken part in. The subjects are well co-ordinated; the co-ordinator is enthusiastic and knows the subjects well. Some good themed resources around topics are being built up, including software. Effective policies have been developed with a good scheme of work in place and the programmes fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum.

Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good; a broad and highly relevant range of learning experiences is provided.
- The subject provides very strong support for pupils' personal, moral, social and cultural education.
- Religious education is taught in blocks, rather than every week but it is well supported by other work, in particular assemblies, so that pupils' achievements are very good.

Commentary

66. Improvement has been very good since the last inspection. The pupils are given a wide range of very interesting learning experiences, and increase their knowledge and understanding of the main world religions particularly well. This is achieved through the timetabled lessons and through assemblies. Only a small number of lessons were able to be observed. However, scrutiny of pupils' work, discussion with the subject co-ordinator, teachers and pupils, observation of school assemblies and religious displays provided good evidence of the school's provision. Teachers use artefacts, visits, stories and games very well to engage pupils' interest and to support their understanding.
67. Pupils' achievements across the school are very good. The newest pupils' interest and attention is engaged through stories and role-play. In their work they learn the basic concepts of friendship and caring for others as well as about other religions. This is achieved through interesting and lively teaching, a carefully thought-out programme and some good resources and artefacts. At the time of the inspection, the topic was the festival of Diwali and work culminated in a celebration assembly. In a lesson previously, very new and sometimes very difficult pupils handled artefacts with care and made great efforts to recall their names. Some pupils who were very new to the school took part in a celebration assembly, acting out the main story, with the more confident reading aloud. Other more established pupils had prepared candles and pots, some in their residences. The atmosphere created demonstrated true spirituality, but also the considerable amount the pupils had learned about Diwali and its symbolism; they took great pride in what they recalled, as a visitor explained how she celebrated Diwali. Visits to local places of worship ensure pupils learn about other religions very well, the oldest pupils being able to identify different key beliefs. The school has a very strong ethos of respect for others and their beliefs and customs which permeates all of its work. This is particularly evident in the approach to religious education and in the high expectations that staff have of pupils' response in these lessons.
68. The curriculum for religious education is very good. The local religious education syllabus has been adapted well to meet the needs and circumstances of the pupils.
69. The co-ordination of religious education is very good. The religious education team leader is enthusiastic and has kept the profile of the subject high. Staff have taken part in recent training. Assessment is sound. Staff know pupils and their achievements well and most record pupils' responses to individual lessons and topics effectively. Planning reveals appropriate attention has been paid to the differing needs and levels of understanding of pupils. Support staff are used very well to help pupils to take an active part in lessons and to manage their particular special educational needs.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

70. Only limited evidence for all subjects in this area could be gathered and as a result, these subjects are not reported in detail.
71. Only one lesson in **art and design** was seen during the inspection and it is not therefore possible to reach a judgement regarding the quality of teaching or provision overall. However, an examination of pupils' work and records indicates that the pupils' achievements are good. Pupils draw and paint, make collages from a variety of materials, produce artefacts in ceramics and display skills in the production of art work in fabric, both in lessons and in support activities. Although there is a dedicated art room, apart from the teacher's use of the kiln, it is not used for the teaching of art and is dedicated for therapeutic work alone.

72. In the art lesson observed the quality of the teaching was good. The lesson incorporated elements of both art (decoration) and design as well as strong links to the theme of the rest of the curriculum. Pupils had to design and construct a sarcophagus in line with their work on Egypt. The planning was good and staff used the well laid out materials, including computers, for research effectively, enabling pupils to work independently and to a high standard. The work undertaken in the residences also contributes well to pupils' achievement.
73. Only one lesson in **design and technology** was observed during the inspection. Although the teaching in this food technology lesson was very good it is not possible to make an overall judgement on the quality of teaching or about provision overall. The standards of work seen, however, indicate that pupils' achievements are good. This would suggest a good improvement since the last inspection.

74. A good range of food technology activities is carried out, although there is less emphasis on work in resistant materials. Pupils do produce artefacts in fabric as well as in paper, card and other materials. The 24 hour curriculum provides additional work in 'making' which is carried out in the residences and some pupils cook meals at lunchtime or in the evenings. The provision of clubs in the evenings, such as the fabric, cooking, model making and costume clubs enhance the formal curriculum significantly.
75. **Music** was not a focus for the inspection but it is evident from the good quality of the pupils' singing and their ability to learn songs quickly that music is very much part of the everyday life of the school. Singing occurs in many lessons and activities and was of very good quality during the school's assembly on Diwali. In addition, the pupils' playing of simple percussion instruments to accompany the singing was very good; it was very rhythmic and well timed. Only one full lesson and a part lesson were observed. The teaching and learning in these lessons were good and the teachers' expertise successfully built upon pupils' strong skills in singing. The pupils sing heartily, with gusto, and well in tune. They clearly enjoy singing and try their hardest to respond to the teacher's requests. Foundation classes regularly join together for music to develop specific skills such as improving dynamics, tempo and pitch. The activities not only improve the pupils' musical skills but also their listening, waiting, turn taking and general responding.
76. No full lessons in **physical education** were observed during the inspection, although inspectors did see part on an evaluation of a lesson. Consequently, no judgement on the overall quality of teaching can be made or of the provision overall. The range of physical activity and the standards of pupils' achievements, however, would indicate that the facilities in physical education are beginning to improve since the last inspection. At the time of the inspection, however, the new sports hall was not yet finished and facilities for gymnastics were still inadequate.
77. The school uses the facilities it has well and makes effective use of local amenities such as the swimming pool in the adjacent caravan park. Pupils evaluate their performance in physical education well. They are able to suggest improvement in technique and readily celebrate the achievements of others. The subject is well led by the specialist co-ordinator who provides a wide raft of physical activities, arranges sporting competitions and more than fulfils the programme of study of the National Curriculum. For example, pupils undertake a range of activities at an outdoor pursuits centre in Wales, ranging from rock-climbing to exploring mines and caverns.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

Overall the provision in the planned and taught programme of PSHE is **very good** with some excellent features. However, because the provision pervades the whole of the work of the school, its contribution to pupils' personal development is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils make excellent progress in relation to their individual needs and targets in their personal development.
- The school provides, within the 24 hour curriculum, a very broad range of opportunities to promotes pupils' well-being and significantly enhances their lives.
- The quality of teaching and support is very good.
- PSHE themes and ideas permeate the whole of school life.
- The school has developed very good policies and programmes to guide teachers in their planning.

Commentary

78. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection and it is, therefore, not possible to make a judgement with regard to improvement since then. The school very effectively achieves its aims of promoting pupils' personal development and meets the needs of individual pupils in an exemplary fashion. The comprehensively planned two year programme of PSHE is enhanced by the vast range of opportunities pupils are given during the school day and in residence. The school sets themes for each half-term and consistently promotes the personal qualities associated with these themes. This is well augmented by wall displays and communal activities such as linked assemblies. This ensures a broad curriculum that significantly contributes to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Many lessons across all subjects end with a period of contemplation and self-evaluation where pupils ask of themselves "How well did I do in relation to my learning and behaviour targets and how can I improve?" This supports their ability to take responsibility for themselves and their behaviour very well indeed.
79. In the two lessons seen, the teaching was good; however, from an examination of pupils' profiles and analysis of their progress, overall teaching is very good. Teachers' planning is very strong and through work on the pupils' high quality individual targets they become more aware of their own personal development and progress. Staff set clear objectives and learning outcomes on the basis of a thorough evaluation of pupils' needs which, when presented to pupils give a clear focus for their progress. All staff participate with pupils in recording and evaluating what pupils have learned and this positively influences the review and modification of targets. The excellent case review system, alongside these detailed records means that assessment, monitoring of progress and the use of information gained in PSHE is very good indeed.
80. The school's provision for pupils' personal, social and health development is a significant strength of the school and has a very positive impact on the excellent relationships within the school. Pupils respond very well to the positive and nurturing atmosphere of the school which allows them to develop confidence and self-worth and to become happier and more assured. The school council meetings and debates within 'circle time', for example, enhance pupils' self-esteem, enabling them to understand that they can contribute to the community by debating school issues in a democratic forum.
81. One of the main features of the very good leadership and management is the high level of collaboration amongst staff across the school. The school has strong links with the local community and encourages visitors from other cultures, for example, at Diwali and Hanukkah. This is further enhanced by the school's participation in visits and outdoor education, for example, the 'outward bound' trip to Rhos-y-Gwaliau in Wales.

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	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
Overall standards achieved	2
Pupils' achievement	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	1
Attendance	2
Attitudes	3
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	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	1
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	2
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 national standards.*