

Office for Standards in Education

Inspection report Hill Top Primary School

Doncaster Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 17 and 18 November 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Hill Top Primary School
Type of school:	Community
Status:	Primary
Age range of pupils:	3 to 11 years
Headteacher:	Mrs D L Simon
Address of school:	Edlington Lane Edlington Doncaster DN12 1PL
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Name and address of appropriate authority: Chair of governors:	
	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	The governing body, address as above Mr J Hainsworth
Chair of governors: Local education authority area:	The governing body, address as above Mr J Hainsworth Doncaster

Introduction

1. Hill Top Primary School is situated in Edlington, a former mining community to the west of Doncaster. It is a larger-than-average school, with 326 pupils on roll, 39 of whom attend the nursery part-time. The roll has fallen by almost 50 pupils since the last inspection. The pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2 are grouped into ten classes, four of which are mixed-age. All of the pupils come from white British families. About three in ten of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above average. Almost one in eight of the pupils is identified as having special educational needs, which is below average, and the number who have a Statement of Special Educational Need is broadly in line with the average for primary schools. The pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below average.

2. The school was inspected in November 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of November 2002. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on four occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In November 2004, two HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of November 2002.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- standards of attainment are too low in Key Stages 1 and 2 and remain well below the national figures. Improvements in the curriculum and in the quality of teaching and learning have not yet had a significant impact on the pupils' results in national tests and assessments. However, standards of literacy and numeracy in both key stages show improvement, especially in Years 2 and 6;
- there is an improving climate for learning; all pupils make at least reasonable progress. Many are increasingly active and enthusiastic learners but some lack confidence as independent learners and rely too heavily on their teachers;
- the system for tracking the pupils' progress is effective and the detailed analysis of the 2004 test results and of interim assessments provides a good basis for focusing strategies on raising attainment. Significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning are accelerating the pace of learning in many classes. However, progress in some classes is still not sufficiently rapid to remedy substantial gaps in the pupil's knowledge, understanding and skills;
- standards in the Foundation Stage are broadly in line with national expectations. This demonstrates rapid progress by the pupils;

- the pupils who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress; provision for them has improved within the school's developing approach to inclusion. Learning support assistants plan alongside teachers and are well prepared for their role in promoting the achievement of individual targets;
- in lessons, most pupils apply themselves conscientiously. They behave very sensibly around the school and on the site; they are very polite to each other and to adults. The pupils appreciate and respect the many improvements that have been made to the buildings, resources and equipment;
- the school's ethos is very good; relationships are excellent throughout the community. Adults are very good role models for the pupils in developing self-esteem and confidence; the school council makes a mature contribution to discussing facilities for the pupils;
- despite considerable improvement, levels of attendance, at 93.4 per cent in the last school year, are still too low. Punctuality is good;
- the school promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development consistently in lessons and assemblies and above all through the way in which the daily business of the school is conducted. The range of extracurricular activities for the pupils is growing rapidly and is good;
- the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; it was at least satisfactory in all lessons and was good or very good in six out of ten. This is a considerable improvement but the proportion of teaching that is good or better is still insufficient to overcome the legacy of unsatisfactory progress in some classes;
- curriculum planning has improved; subjects are more closely linked and there is a clear focus on transferable skills. Close attention is given to ensuring that pupils of the same age in different classes cover the requirements of the national programmes of study;
- leadership and management of the school are very good; the headteacher is a calm, decisive and purposeful leader and is ably supported by other senior managers. Strategic plans are appropriately challenging and are based on a realistic self-evaluation of the school's current strengths and weaknesses;
- the role of subject leaders is developing well; most have a sound awareness of provision across the school and are accepting greater accountability for raising standards;
- the governing body is loyal and supportive; it is increasingly confident in holding the school to account and in monitoring its progress both through reports and at first hand. It has worked hard to improve communication with parents and the broader community;
- the local education authority (LEA) has provided the school with good support in addressing the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Advice and training have been targeted successfully at the school's specific

needs and helpful evaluations of progress have been provided for the headteacher and governors.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- raise standards of attainment;
- further increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better to accelerate the progress made by the pupils in some classes;
- continue to develop opportunities for all pupils to become confident, independent learners.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards of attainment are too low in Key Stages 1 and 2 and remain well below the national figures. Improvements in the curriculum and in the quality of teaching and learning have not yet had a significant impact on the pupils' results in national tests and assessments. However, standards of literacy and numeracy in both key stages show improvement, especially in Years 2 and 6.

8. Results in the 2003 end-of-Key Stage 1 national tests were below those typically attained by pupils in similar schools. In 2004, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 2 was slightly lower in reading and mathematics, and significantly lower in writing, where it fell from 70 per cent to just over 40 per cent. The higher Level 3 was attained by a greater proportion of pupils in mathematics than in 2003, 21 per cent compared with 11 per cent, but no pupil reached this level in reading or writing. In all assessments, girls outperformed boys. The results fell well short of the school's targets and interim estimates.

9. In the end-of-Key Stage 2 tests, the slight improvement in results between 2002 and 2003 was not sustained in 2004. The proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 4 remained the same in English at 51 per cent, but fell in mathematics from over 60 per cent to just below 50 per cent and in science from well over 70 per cent to just below 50 per cent. Girls attained better results than boys in all three subjects, especially in science. Overall, these results were very low compared with those typically achieved in schools in which the pupils had attained similar results in their end-of-Key Stage 1 tests four years previously. The school's targets, which had been revised downwards to take account of pupil mobility, were missed by large margins in all three subjects, especially in science.

10. There is an improving climate for learning in the school; the quality of learning was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons and the pupils made good progress in just over half of them. This is a much-improved picture since the last inspection. School managers have introduced an effective system for tracking the pupils' progress; detailed analyses of the 2004 test results and of internal assessments provide a good basis for focusing specific strategies on

raising attainment. The school has set challenging, but not unrealistic, targets for individual pupils. Significant improvements in the quality of teaching are accelerating the pace of learning in many classes. Many pupils are increasingly active and enthusiastic learners; however, some rely too much on their teachers to help them and lack the self-esteem to tackle challenges confidently for themselves. Progress in some classes is still not sufficiently rapid to remedy substantial gaps in the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills that are the legacy of weak curriculum planning and previously unsatisfactory teaching. Records for the pupils in Year 2, for example, show that a substantial majority is predicted to fall short of the expected levels in reading and writing unless they make rapid progress this year. Similar levels of underachievement have been identified among Year 6 pupils but the progress made, and the standards attained, by pupils in the upper part of Key Stage 2 are improving.

Standards in English are unsatisfactory, but the school's focus on raising standards 11. of literacy is beginning to show results. Most pupils listen politely to adults and to their peers; however, they are often passive listeners and do not always respond with sufficient interest or sense of enquiry to what they hear. Although many pupils do not give full explanations in reply to questions, most teachers are aware of the need to develop the pupils' confidence and stamina as speakers. There were several impressive instances of young pupils articulating personal ideas and feeling and some older pupils are gaining assurance in asking questions to consolidate or extend their learning. The provision of additional guided reading sessions has been successful in reinforcing the pupils' mechanical skills, but higher reading skills such as inference and deduction are not yet developed to the expected levels. Some pupils are unselective readers, especially when using information texts, and they fail to extract and re-present the most significant points. The pupils do not often write at length in other subjects, which limits their opportunities to develop skills in planning and adapting texts for different purposes and readers. Basic technical errors persist in much of the pupils' written work, including that of some high-attaining pupils, but in most classes the presentation of work is greatly improved; Year 6 pupils in particular take evident pride in the appearance of their work. Better attention is now paid to developing a uniform style of handwriting throughout the school.

12. The pupils' mathematical skills are improving, but remain generally below the levels expected in relation to their age. Too many pupils lack confidence in applying basic number skills, for example when choosing whether to use multiplication or addition or when trying to remember their times tables and few independently suggest alternative ways of solving problems. However, opportunities to develop the pupils' numeracy skills are actively sought in the Foundation Stage classes and older pupils are now helped systematically to interpret mathematical problems by analysing the operations involved.

13. Standards in science are unsatisfactory. Teachers have responded positively to the disappointing test results in 2004 by reviewing the science curriculum. They recognise that more attention must be paid to helping the pupils acquire the basic knowledge and skills they need to develop an enquiring approach and to gain confidence in formulating and testing hypotheses. During a recent monitoring inspection, some pupils in Key Stage 2 were unable to read basic information from a simple graph while others were uncertain about categorising substances as solids, liquids or gases. However, these same pupils now exhibit good research and presentational skills, for example in work on the solar system, and are working towards the standard that would be expected of pupils of that age.

14. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are improving and are satisfactory overall. Pupils use computers independently from an early age and understand how to operate programs of increasing complexity. Older pupils create and save their own documents and files and use an appropriate range of effects within word processing and desktop-publishing programs. Increasing use is made of the school's ICT equipment and resources, which have been enhanced by interactive whiteboards and digital projectors. Teachers effectively model the power and usefulness of ICT in many lessons when using laptop computers for whole-class presentations and individual demonstrations.

15. Standards in the Foundation Stage are broadly in line with national expectations. This demonstrates rapid progress by the pupils. The pupils enjoy an extensive range of well planned activities that provides a coherent programme across the areas of learning. For example, the pupils' personal, social and emotional development is encouraged through opportunities to work alone and in different groupings so that they develop independence but also understand the need to share and co-operate. Adults seize opportunities to extend the pupils' vocabulary through talking about their daily lives and previous work in school; the pupils are very good listeners and talk confidently about their learning and themselves. The development of the pupils' skills in counting, pattern and recognising shapes is well supported through interesting practical activities such as making biscuits. The good outside play area provides a stimulating environment within which the pupils can practise their communication and social skills while enjoying energetic and safe physical activity.

16. The pupils who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Provision has improved within the school's developing approach to inclusion. Providing appropriate work for individual pupils is now an integral aspect of the teachers' planning; group activities mostly take account of the pupils' preferred learning styles and their concentration spans. Learning support assistants have time to plan alongside teachers; they are well prepared for their role in promoting the achievement of targets set within individual education plans and make effective contributions to reviews of progress.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory in all lessons; they were good or very good in three quarters. Most pupils apply themselves conscientiously to their work, enjoy opportunities to work both collaboratively and independently and are usually positive and cheerful. They respond eagerly to challenges and persevere to achieve goals that they understand are within reach. However, a few pupils lack concentration and are easily discouraged when the level of challenge in tasks is either too much or too little. Most teachers now use effective techniques to stimulate and sustain concentration during lessons; pupils enjoy these 'brain gym' sessions and respond enthusiastically.

18. The whole-school approach to managing the pupils' behaviour is very successful. Pupils and teachers understand measures that promote good behaviour; sanctions are seldom needed and the pupils enjoy earning rewards. The use of exclusion has declined significantly since the previous inspection; in the last school year there were just eight fixed-term exclusions totalling 29 days; in the current term, there has been only one, lasting two days. There has been a similar marked decrease in the use of detention. Teachers and other adults now expect the pupils to behave well, and this expectation is handsomely repaid. 19. The pupils behave very sensibly around the school and on the site; they appreciate the many improvements that have been made to the buildings and respect the school's resources and equipment. The many attractive displays in classrooms and on corridors are undamaged; there is no vandalism and hardly any litter around the site and the buildings are spotlessly clean.

20. The school's ethos is very good. Relationships are excellent throughout the community; the pupils are very polite to each other, for example in holding doors open and in acknowledging thanks. They are equally polite to adults; visitors are treated with great respect and courtesy. Adults are good role models for the pupils in developing their self-esteem and confidence. The pupils' views are taken seriously; the school council makes an effective contribution to discussing facilities in the school.

21. Despite a significant improvement, attendance in the last school year, at 93.4 per cent, was low in comparison with the national median for primary schools. However, this figure was above that typically reached in similar schools. Improvements in attendance are ascribed to increased parental support and the co-ordinated approach of the inclusion team which has involved external agencies in targeting individual pupils with poor attendance. Attendance in the first half of the current term, at 93.2 per cent, was slightly higher than for the same period last year and the school is confident that it will meet the LEA's target of 93.6 per cent for the school year. If achieved, this would be just below the national median for primary schools. Punctuality is good; very few pupils arrive late to school.

22. The school promotes the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development consistently in lessons and assemblies and above all through the way in which the daily business of the school is conducted. Right and wrong are clearly distinguished. One of the golden rules for behaviour is used as a weekly theme for reflection and purposefully supports the pupils' personal development as well as enhancing consistency in managing their behaviour. In its application for the healthy schools initiative award the school has emphasised elements of the personal, social and health education programme that are significant in the pupils' personal development. Assemblies include appropriate Christian elements and provide time for personal reflection and prayer; celebrations from other world religions are suitably acknowledged.

23. The school council represents and acts responsibly upon the pupils' concerns; members report that teachers listen to them and enable them to take actions that improve their school. Council members are currently seeking ideas for improving manners in the dining room at lunchtime and are researching ways to raise funds for broadening extracurricular provision. The range of extracurricular activities is growing rapidly and is good; imaginative use has been made of links with the wider community to gain access to additional funding. There has been a successful arts week; there is wide-ranging provision for different sporting, artistic and musical activities; theatre groups have visited the school. The formation of a signing club, led by a learning support assistant, has been a particularly welcome development in broadening the pupils' understanding of inclusion.

The quality of education

24. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; it was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons and was good or very good in six out of ten. This is a considerable improvement

since the last inspection. However, the proportion of teaching that is good or better is still insufficient to overcome the legacy of unsatisfactory progress in some classes.

25. In the best lessons, the pupils were helped to understand specific learning objectives. Teachers were clear about the 'big picture', thanks to high quality planning. The best teaching gave the pupils time to think and reflect; they were often asked to talk to a partner, or simply to think for themselves for a few moments, before answering questions. The most effective teachers drew sensitive personal responses from the pupils; they bolstered self-esteem, but were not afraid to probe and challenge or to set high expectations. These teachers knew who to push hard, and when; they had an instinctive rapport with the pupils and had developed a strikingly mature and respectful relationship with them.

26. In the satisfactory lessons, some common weaknesses limited the potential effectiveness of the teaching and hindered the pupils' progress. Although all teachers knew what they should be teaching and were aware of the need to use engaging methods and resources, some did not generate sufficient pace or excitement; the pupils were not swept along on a wave of enthusiasm as happened in the best lessons. Sometimes, there was insufficient challenge to high-attaining pupils; the teachers' expectations were too easily satisfied and the pupils had little idea of what to do to improve the quality of their work.

27. Learning support assistants have received trained and are well prepared to intervene with particular pupils following the analysis of performance data and the updating of individual education plans. Most learning support assistants strike a good balance between helping pupils and challenging them to succeed on their own. Some are skilled in developing sequences of questions that simultaneously assess and support the pupils' understanding.

28. Extensive use is made of targets; individual targets are written into the pupils' books, and group targets covering a range of skills and subjects are displayed in all classrooms. The marking of the pupils' work is generally rigorous; pupils are frequently invited to evaluate the success of their own work and sometimes that of their peers. Teachers have received training on how to use day-to-day assessment and carefully planned questioning to improve the level of challenge for different individuals and groups. Homework is seen as central to the school's determined effort to raise standards; tellingly, it has been renamed 'home *learning*' and parents are kept well informed about the school's expectations.

29. Increasing use is made of assessment data and other information about the pupils to ensure that groupings and staffing facilitate effective teaching and learning. Booster classes and other sources of additional help are used systematically where specific needs or shortcomings have been identified. Subject co-ordinators work closely with senior managers and class teachers to ensure that resources are used appropriately and efficiently.

30. Links between subjects have improved and there is a clear focus on transferable skills that will enhance the pupils' capacity to learn and their confidence. An intervention programme has been designed for those pupils in Year 1 who are ill-equipped to tackle the programmes of study for pupils of their age. Close attention has been given to ensuring that pupils of the same age in different classes, or pupils of different ages in the same class, cover the national programmes of study. Teachers have received effective training in implementing national strategies. The importance of a broad curriculum has been recognised and adults

such as the physical education co-ordinator, the art development worker and a peripatetic music teacher have contributed significantly to the well-developed arts programme.

31. The quality of provision in the Foundation Stage is good. Teachers have established purposeful routines within a bright and attractive environment. The quality of teaching has improved markedly. Work is planned and cross-referenced between teachers and other adults so that learning opportunities are used to the full and the pupils' achievements are continuously assessed and recorded. A happy atmosphere of mutual respect and affection underpins the adults' genuine concern for the pupils' development. The outside playground is well-equipped and is being extended to include a secure grassed area that will provide an impressive range of opportunities for learning through play.

32. The school's accommodation, facilities and resources have been greatly enhanced. Carpeting, redecoration and improved display areas have helped improve the pupils' attitudes to learning and increase their self-esteem. There is a well-equipped but poorly ventilated computer room in the main part of the school and a separate computer area for Year 6 pupils. Several other quiet work areas have been tidied and made more attractive and are used to support more adventurous approaches to teaching and independent learning. Quiet classical music is played in the corridors during the day; this is very pleasant and also contributes to the calm, sensible movement of pupils at break times. The remodelled central quadrangle is both an excellent resource for outside investigative work and an inspiring example of transformation that impresses itself on everyone who moves around the building.

33. The pupils are well cared-for; pastoral systems ensure that any problems are noticed and acted upon quickly. The pupils trust their teachers and feel supported by them. Developing the use of circle time has been a powerful factor in transforming the pupils' behaviour and in establishing an ethos of mutual respect between adults and children.

34. Links with parents and the community are good. The school sends out regular, informative newsletters and arranges workshops for parents to explain curriculum developments. Although it remains a struggle to entice some parents into the school, attendance was up by a third at the most recent consultation evening. Staff are in the playground at the start and end of the day; this accessibility, together with the evident improvement in the quality of provision, is increasing parents' confidence and is encouraging them to play a more active part in their children's education, for example through ensuring better attendance and in supporting the school's moves to provide more work to be done at home. The school is committed to taking parents' views into account when formulating the detail of the school improvement plan that will guide the school's future development.

Leadership and management

35. Leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher is a calm, decisive and purposeful leader who manages the school very effectively and with quiet efficiency. She is ably supported by other senior managers; all are relatively new to their roles but have a good understanding of where to challenge and where to support in raising expectations. Very good teamwork is evident in the shared values and aspirations of senior leaders and their individual confidence shows in the growing influence of the different management teams they lead. These teams focus on strategy, curriculum and inclusion, and offer practical development opportunities to other staff who wish to join them. Strategic plans are appropriately detailed and are based on a realistic self-evaluation of the school's

current strengths and weaknesses. Despite the low standards attained by the pupils in national tests, the senior leadership team is well placed to secure improvements. A palpable emphasis on learning is at the heart of the vision and values of the school. Managers have been decisive in reallocating staff to classes so as to enhance the opportunities for a weak Year 6 cohort to achieve well in their end-of-key-stage tests.

36. The roles of subject leaders and other middle managers is developing well. Most have taken full advantage of opportunities to develop a sound awareness of provision across the school. They have greater accountability for raising standards; responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating their areas are closely linked to individual objectives within the school's performance management system. All co-ordinators prepare action plans, based on scrutinies of pupils' work and teachers' planning. Senior staff have identified several middle managers with leadership potential who are being encouraged to develop themselves while working for the good of the school. Some co-ordinators have attended meetings of the governing body to discuss changes to the curriculum.

37. The governing body is loyal and supportive and increasingly confident in holding the school to account. A committee meets termly to monitor and review progress with action and development plans. More governors are developing their knowledge of the school's work through carefully planned and focused visits and members of the senior leadership team have made presentations to governors. Governors have benefited from extensive training, notably in understanding performance data and in the protocols of visiting classrooms and talking to teachers about their work. The governing body has been successful in improving communications with parents and the broader community; although some parents are reluctant to attend formal meetings, there is a distinct sense of increased confidence in the school's achievements and of greater trust in its leaders and managers.

38. The LEA has given the school well-planned and effective support in addressing weaknesses. Advice and training have been targeted successfully at the school's specific needs. For example, the co-ordinators' plans to improve the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills have been discussed and put into action with the help of consultants, advisory teachers and advanced skills teachers. Valuable enhancements have been provided for the school's support programme for a newly qualified teacher. Whole school reviews have provided helpful evaluations of progress for the headteacher, other managers and governors, as have meetings of the steering group. An experienced consultant headteacher has provided an invaluable sounding-board for senior managers in devising successful strategies to reinvigorate and redirect the school. The LEA has appropriate plans to continue to provide support for the school to ensure that standards of attainment improve as intended.

Implementation of the action plan

39. The inspection report of 2002 required the school to address four key issues. These principally related to: improving leadership and management; improving the quality of teaching and learning; improving the quality of assessment and raising expectations of pupils' progress; and improving the level of attendance and reducing the numbers of exclusions. Overall, good progress has been made and most tasks have been completed, but there is still some work to do.

40. Since the last inspection, a new leadership team has been appointed and several other staff, some new to the school, have taken up fresh roles in co-ordinating subjects and aspects. Staffing in the Foundation Unit has also changed considerably; management of this part of the school is now stable after a period of some turbulence. Strategic planning is good and a shared, optimistic vision has been established across the whole community.

41. The quality of teaching and learning is much improved. Staff are more confident to try new approaches and the pupils have responded well by becoming more committed and enthusiastic learners. As the pupils' self-esteem has grown, their confidence has improved and they are better prepared to learn. A small amount of dull teaching remains but, in general, the pupils are making at least sound progress thanks to the good proportion of lively and enthusiastic teaching. The teachers' expectations of the pupils' behaviour and academic achievement have improved considerably. Effective assessment systems support target-setting and regular tracking of the pupils' progress. Attainment in national tests is not yet good enough, but solid foundations have been laid to address this weakness.

42. The school has instituted good procedures for following up absences and has raised the overall level of attendance by some three percentage points in recent years but it remains below the national figure. Exclusion is seen as a last resort; on the rare occasions when it is used, pupils are quickly and successfully reintegrated into the school.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in November 2002. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in June and November 2003, and in March and June 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of November 2002.

In November 2004, two HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Twenty three lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and one registration session were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff and other nominated teachers and with members of the school council. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of November 2002 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.